

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for providing automated directory assistance, comprising:
 - initiating a multi-stage directory assistance dialog
5 with a user;
 - prompting the user for a directory assistance utterance in accordance with a current stage of the multi-stage dialog;
 - recording a user utterance in response to the
10 prompt;
 - gathering one or more directory assistance search parameters from the user utterance;
 - determining whether a user directory assistance query may be completed based on gathered directory
15 assistance search parameters;
 - repeating the prompting operation until either the user directory assistance query may be completed or a determination that a user utterance satisfies an error condition; and
 - 20 displaying gathered directory assistance search parameters on an operator terminal and forwarding one or more recorded user utterances to an operator for playback in response to a failure to obtain the directory assistance search parameters needed to complete the user
25 directory assistance query.

2. The method of Claim 1, further comprising:
playing for an operator a user utterance satisfying
the error condition; and
playing for the operator a preceding utterance, the
5 user utterance being received prior to the error
utterance.

3. The method of Claim 1, further comprising
determining when a user utterance satisfies an error
10 condition based on whether the user utterance is
discernable utilizing speech recognition.

4. The method of Claim 1, further comprising
classifying received user utterances according to a
15 confidence level including high confidence and one or
more lesser confidences.

5. The method of Claim 4, further comprising
populating the operator terminal with the directory
20 assistance parameters gathered from the user utterances
and classified with a high confidence level.

6. The method of Claim 1, further comprising
highlighting one or more fields of the operator terminal
25 populated with information provided by the caller in the
utterances.

7. The method of Claim 1, further comprising
combining two user utterances into one utterance for
30 playback to the operator.

8. Software for providing directory assistance, the software embodied in computer readable media and when executed operable to:

extract for use in a computer-assisted database
5 search one or more directory assistance search parameters from a plurality of user utterances; and
forward for review by an operator the extracted directory assistance search parameters and one or more recorded user utterances in response to a failure to
10 resolve a user directory assistance query.

9. The software of Claim 8, further operable to:
determine when one of the user utterances initiates an error condition; and
15 transfer the caller to an operator upon occurrence of the error condition.

10. The software of Claim 9, further operable to:
play for the operator the user utterance initiating
20 the error condition; and
play for the operator a preceding user utterance, the preceding user utterance being the last good user utterance received before the error user utterance.

25 11. The software of Claim 8, further operable to populate an operator computer screen with information extracted from one or more user utterances and classified with a high confidence level.

12. The software of Claim 11, further operable to highlight one or more fields in the operator computer screen requiring additional information from the user.

5 13. The software of Claim 8, further operable to ascertain whether results from a completed directory assistance query would be more efficiently communicated to the user via the operator or via an automated service.

10 14. The software of Claim 8, further operable to redirect the user to an operator for communication of the directory assistance query results when the results exceed a predefined query results maximum.

15. An automated directory assistance system,
comprising:

an input/output port operable to communicate with a
communication network;

5 a processor operably coupled to the input/output
port;

a memory operably coupled to the processor; and

a program of instructions storable in the memory and
executable by the processor, the program of instructions
10 operable to populate a computer terminal with directory
assistance search parameters extracted from one or more
user utterances and forward one or more recorded user
utterances to an operator for playback in response to
detection of an error condition preventing completion of
15 a user directory assistance query.

16. The system of Claim 15, further comprising the
program of instructions operable to determine when a user
utterance satisfies an error condition, transfer the user
20 to an operator upon occurrence of the error condition,
and play to the operator the error utterance and a
preceding utterance.

17. The system of Claim 15, further comprising the
25 program of instructions operable to populate the computer
terminal with information extracted from the one or more
user utterances and classified with a high confidence
level.

18. The system of Claim 15, further comprising the
program of instructions operable to redirect the user to
an operator when a completed directory assistance query
yields a number of results in excess of a predetermined
5 maximum.

19. The system of Claim 15, further comprising the
program of instructions operable to redirect the user to
an operator when a completed directory assistance query
10 yields no results.

20. The system of Claim 15, further comprising the
program of instructions operable to conduct a
disambiguation dialog with the user when a completed
15 directory assistance query yields a plurality of similar
results.